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HOWARD BATMAN

An Interview Conducted by

Donn Roberts

November 25, 1980

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"WORKS OF REFERENCE"

December 5, 1980

DATE

NARRATOR DATA SHEET

Name of narrator: Howard Batman

Address: 25 Hamilton Road, Terre Haute, IN Phone: 812 232-9571 (office)

Birthdate: 74 years Birthplace: Marengo, Indiana

Length of residence in Terre Haute: _____

Education: Bachelor's Indiana University

Jurisprudence Doctorate, Indiana University

Occupational history: Attorney for Lincoln National Insurance

Company. Public Relations Officer United States Navy, WW II.

Practicing attorney and partner of Terre Haute Law firm since 1946.

Special interests, activities, etc. History. Politics in Indiana.

For additional information, see Terre Haute and Her People of

Progress, 1970, "Howard Taylor Batman," 38, 242. (Vigo County

Public Library Special Collections)

Major subject(s) of interview: Former Terre Haute Mayor Donn M.
Roberts, his political activities and his sentence to the federal
penitentiary. Other political subjects in Terre Haute.

No. of tapes: 1 Length of interview: 45 minutes more or less

Terms of legal agreement: _____

Interviewing sessions:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Interviewer</u>
Nov. 25, 1980	6 P.M.	Batman residence 25 Hamilton Road Terre Haute, IN	Don Roberts

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HOWARD BATMAN

Tape 1

November 25, 1980

Residence of Mr. Batman at 25 Hamilton Road, Terre Haute, IN

INTERVIEWER: Don Roberts

TRANSCRIBER: Kathleen M. Skelly

For: Vigo County Oral History Program

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DR: My name is Don Roberts. I'll be interviewing Mr. Howard Batman for the oral history project. We're going to discuss one of Terre Haute's early mayors, Mr. Donn M. Roberts, and also some other pertinent points in the history of the city of Terre Haute and Vigo County, especially some of the political figures.

Mr. Batman, why don't we start talking about Donn Roberts, who was mayor up until 1915? I know you have been a kind of a student of Mayor Roberts and that era. I just wondered what comments would you make about his administration, to get us started. We've got a stack of notes here, I know, where we can do some details, but I think it would be good to just start with an overall comment.

BATMAN: Well, of course, Donn Roberts is a legendary figure in Terre Haute politics and to a certain degree in Indiana politics. But he was certainly the most colorful mayor and had the most tragic events surrounding his administration than any mayor I'm sure that we ever had.

He was a brilliant man. There have been many stories as to his student days at then Rose Polytechnic Institute, now Rose-Hulman. I think it's a matter to be researched as to exactly what his scholarship status was. There's no question that he stood very high in his graduating class. Whether or not he was the highest who ever graduated, I don't know. That fact ought to be established very easily.

DR: The one thing I know for sure is he received the Hemingway Award, and I understand that the Hemingway Award is for the highest student academically in that particular class. But I agree with you, whether or not he was highest in all the other classes up to his time is something we'd have to look into.

BATMAN: He was a brilliant student. I mean the Hemingway student at Rose-Hulman now (Rose Polytechnic it used to be) was a much coveted award and a mark of great

BATMAN: distinction and indication of worth of his intellect and his studious character because otherwise he couldn't have won it.

DR: Well, some of the notes that I've come up with . . . I know you and I have been out and visited Donn Roberts's tombstone at St. Joseph cemetery, which is a part of Woodlawn cemetery in Terre Haute up on North 3rd Street. But I notice that his father, William H. Roberts, Sr., was a physician who had come from down in Gibson County, Indiana . . .

BATMAN: That's right..

DR: . . . had sat in the office with the physician there and seemed to be such a bright young man that he was sent to the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. He graduated there in 1861, went in the Confederate Army and served as a medical officer in the Confederate Army. And in late 1865 or -66, /he/ came back to Indiana with his new medical . . . with his medical license and then went to Annapolis, Illinois, which is not all that far from Terre Haute -- just somewhat west of the Wabash. /He/ practiced medicine /there/ for a short time. He met Octavia Bruner there at Annapolis, a young lady. They were married, and they had their first child /who/ was Donn M. Roberts who was born there on September 28, 1867. And somewhat later that year, probably very early '68, the family moved to Terre Haute. W. H. Roberts, his wife Octavia, and the new baby son, Donn M.

And I know, of course, Dr. Roberts set up his practice in Terre Haute. According to the records that I can find, he opened an office on Wabash and 4th /Street/ and had a home down near 4th and Walnut or maybe on down three or four blocks. Later he built a nice home on the corner of Ohio and 7th just across from where the Indiana Theater is now. There's a new savings and loan building /there now/. And for a number of years Dr. Roberts lived in that home, reared his family there, and practiced. And then in his later years, he had an office and a small apartment that he occupied as living quarters in the building at the corner of Wabash and . . . You'll have to help me out, Howard. Let me see. It's the Baskin-Robbins ice cream store in there now.

DR: That building . . .

BATMAN: It's on 4th. The northwest corner of 4th and Wabash. 424½ Wabash Avenue

DR: Right. That's where the elder Dr. Roberts lived.

One thing I'd say, I know he was quite a surgeon, quite interested in politics. This was Donn's father. He was a big man. His pictures indicate that he was well-dressed and stout and handsome. One time he introduced Grover Cleveland when Grover Cleveland made a speech at Brazil, Indiana. He looked down into the crowd and to his amazement there was his small son, Donn M., who had played hooky and had come out to hear President Cleveland. There are those that say that the old doctor probably straightened young Donn out for skipping school. The family did very well. And, of course, Donn came up through the schools. I have to do a little bit more work on his elementary school, but, as you say, he got his college education at Rose Polytechnic Institute.

Then, I'm going to . . . let me give just a little bit more biographical material, and then I'm sure that we want to get you to talk about some of the days in the political side of what happened.

He graduated in 1898 from Rose Polytechnic, went into . . . started a construction company. Then for a number of years -- about 10 years -- the Donn Roberts Construction Company built streets and sewers in Washington, D.C., and Lafayette, Indiana. The West Terre Haute grade, which is out here west of town, was completed during the cold months of October and November. Most people said, "Well, it just can't be done." But they went out there and they did it. They did the grade and some of the first paving. And that company for about 10 years did very well. They had a national reputation. Donn, I guess, was quite a good engineer and good manager. About 1910, he became -- just prior to that time -- became city engineer and had a squabble, I think. There was a mayor by the name of Frank C. Donaldson. And he fired Donn and one thing and another. And then I believe that Donn became the Vigo County Democratic chairman. I believe in 1910. How does . . . does your memory . . .

BATMAN: I'm sure that's the exact date. It was just a couple of years before the great presidential campaign of 1912, and the Republican party was split and the Democratic party began to take over.

DR: Um hm, um hm.

Apparently he was quite an organizer as county chairman. Apparently he exhibited some leadership ability and . . .

BATMAN: The stories that probably can't be substantiated but make for a lot of truth was that his experience in getting paving contracts and bridge-building work and operations in the municipalities had given him an insight into the way that the political world operated. And there were many rumors at that time that he had very inside tracks on bids for various projects that he put together, not only here but the contract in Lafayette, Indiana, and also in Washington. Those can't be substantiated and may have been idle rumors. But it isn't unusual, we know, for contractors and politicians having control over roads and streets. They have a rather close relationship. Rumors at that time were that he had a closer relationship perhaps than the ordinary ethics in business would indicate were proper.

DR: Um hmm.

Well, apparently, during 1910 and '11 he decided to run for mayor himself. And as I understand it, I believe it was the election of 1912 when he was elected mayor -- November -- apparently taking office in the early days of 1913. Does that sound right to you?

BATMAN: I believe that's exactly right.

DR: Then he was mayor and the city . . . he was quite, quite the domineering mayor I would guess. But it was . . . the large story or scandal that so many people have heard so much about apparently developed in November -- the November 4th election -- in 1914. From some of the information I found, there was a circuit judge by the name of Charles [L.] Pulliam. Apparently Mayor Roberts and his party wanted to unseat Judge Pulliam, and they worked very hard for the election

DR: of Judge Eli H. Redman. And from reading newspaper accounts of the trial that occurred later in 1915, I noticed people who testified . . . by the way, this testimony must have carried some credence because there were convictions, as you well know; and they sent some people to the penitentiary, including Mayor Roberts.

Apparently a lot of this testimony indicated that polling place officials were paid off, and there were fake registration slips prepared, and carloads of people went around and voted numerous times. But in any case, Eli Redman came out of the election ten votes ahead of Judge Pulliam and was declared the winner. And -- Howard, I'd better let you talk about some of this -- but that election with all of those attendant things apparently led to a very lengthy investigation by U.S. marshals and . . . I mean the U.S. Department of Justice. And let me let you pick that up there. (chuckles)

BATMAN: Well, the election, of course, was one of the most sensational in . . . probably the most in Indiana. Roberts had put together a political machine the like of which in these times we can hardly understand. He did control completely the red light district of Terre Haute, which covered a considerable territory. The precinct committeemen, his organization . . . if you studied the names of the people who were on the list of precinct committeemen in that election and find out what they did, they were either employees of the city or they had close family connections who were employees of the city or they were what we might call more-or-less stooges that were beholden to Donn Roberts and his associates. And, of course, the stories that came out of the behavior of the people on election day would make the stories that surround Mayor Daley of Chicago and Bathhouse John Coghlan and those Chicago characters pale in significance.

The record had been proven, was proved in court, before the federal court in Indianapolis which tried this case. Judge Anderson was known as a very strict interpreter of the law and one of the last real hardheaded, heavy-handed jurists. And evidence came out in the trial of guns being planted on the poll watchers who were then arrested by the sheriff

BATMAN: and hauled off to jail so that /Roberts'7 voters would have a free hand. There was evidence that many people voted more than once, and later it developed that names were taken from tombstones at cemeteries and voted in the election.

Today it would be, of course, absolutely impossible, I hope, to see a thing like that carried on. But Roberts had an airtight organization. He had people who were loyal to him and were under obligations to him, and he had hammered out a political machine the likes of which probably had never existed before in the twentieth century, certainly in Indiana, and the likelihood that they ever will, of course, is very doubtful. But he really, he really had complete control.

DR: I know one of the stories that I found . . . I believe from reading accounts of the testimony in those federal trials, there was a gentleman who only had one leg. And he had ten different types of devices -- a cork leg, a wooden leg, a crutch, an aluminum thing, different canes. And there had been some classes -- we'll call them that -- supposedly conducted by the mayor, Mayor Roberts, on how to prepare these fake registration slips. They would take a gentleman like this man with the one leg along with some others, give each of them this slip, put them in the car, drive them around from polling place to polling place. And, of course, this man would put on a different leg for each polling place . . .

BATMAN: Right.

DR: . . . and go in and vote. Vote numerous times.

There are other stories, which I'm sure you would know, of a carload of fellows /which/ appeared at one of the polling places (I can't remember just which precinct, but I have it in my notes somewhere) and at gunpoint seized the ballot boxes, withdrew as though they were robbing a bank, and sped away, the assumption being that they stuffed . . . they changed the ballots. And when those were turned in at the courthouse later to be counted, the ballots then carried whatever the (laughs) preponderance of votes for Judge Redman, I would guess. (more laughing)

BATMAN: Yes, there are a number of stories like that and in addition, of course, the stories of the

BATMAN: madames of the various houses in the red light districts who go to their employees and perhaps more than once. It's difficult to imagine a city with a red light district -- all of which, of course, was completely illegal -- reaching from a block north of the courthouse for four or five blocks north and then east over to a place which would now embrace a portion of Indiana State (laughs) University and then stopped one block north of Wabash. But those were the conditions. The district was completely under police protection.

DR: Well, Howard, in my research, I found that according to the reports of the day, all of this came out and some people became appropriately enraged during 1915. There was a state level or county level investigation and the mayor and some of the public officials were tried in the County Circuit court and, of course, they were acquitted. They just couldn't make it stick. But this had all generated the interest of the U.S. attorney's office. And as I . . . now you'll know more about . . . being an attorney, you'll understand this a lot better than I, but apparently during 1914, the federal government . . . the Congress had passed some election law reforms which Donn Roberts and his people had just violated right and left. And in any case, the team of federal marshals . . . indictments were handed down on 116 people in Terre Haute -- the sheriff, the deputies, most members of the council . . .

BATMAN: Circuit judge.

DR: . . . circuit judge, Redman (Judge Redman), and just a whole lot of people. And the story where I pick up here, in . . . so the indictments were laid out. The chief U. S. Marshal was a man named Mark Storen. He deputized about 40 Indianapolis police officers. Then he had another group of regular U.S. marshals, and they arrived in Terre Haute on December 27 by train. They had their own special car with them. They set up shop in room 420 and room 421 of the Deming Hotel. Now, I understand that you have the door -- No. 420 -- off that room.

BATMAN: That's correct.

DR: In your house. Is that right?

BATMAN: That's true.

DR: And they then began to span out to serve these warrants. Well, as the word spread, a lot of the people appeared there and said, "Well, here I am." And approximately 80 of the 116 people made arrangements to post bond and one thing another.

Mayor Roberts at 10 a.m. that day, December 27, 1914, walked over to the Deming and walked through the lobby, which was full of people -- /a/ rather carnival atmosphere, the curious and so on -- proceeded up to room 420, and said to Marshal Storen, "What the hell's going on here? What right have you got to arrest the Democrats?" And so forth and so on. And Marshal informed him that he was under arrest, /and asked him/ "Did he wish to make bond." And he said, "No, I do not; I'll go with the boys." And as I understand it, some of the town's well-known people -- I believe Jacob Deming, possibly Mr. /Crawford/ Fairbanks and some others -- appeared offering to post the mayor's bond, and he refused it.

And later that evening . . . and Howard, I'll come back. I know you've got something you can fill in here. Approximately 8:30 that evening Marshal Storen said, "Well, I'm tired of waiting. Either you post bond or you're going to Indianapolis to jail." Whereupon the mayor said, "I'm going with the boys."

So, the other 20 were escorted east along Cherry Street over to 9th by the marshals and proceeded north on 9th Street to the railroad station. But Donn walked along with Storen and a couple of secret service men up Cherry Street. It was a cold February night, and they stepped over the snow and all that. And at 7th Street this small group with the mayor turned left and proceeded then up 7th Street past along where the churches are and turned right then and proceeded over to 9th and past the railroad station.

They all got on the special car. They were handcuffed, and at 8:53 the train departed for Indianapolis, Indiana. When they arrived at the Marion County jail, they were incarcerated. The reports say that Mayor Roberts was the most immaculately dressed prisoner they'd ever had. He turned in a large roll of money (Batman laughs), a beautiful gold watch engraved from his admirers with chain, a beautiful hat (I'm not sure just what kind yet) and refused

DR: to make bail; /he/ went in jail.

A few days later before the trial started, his wife went over . . . Grace, his wife Mary Grace, and his daughter, Matilda. He did go out on bail and they lived in a hotel, and, of course, the trial proceeded up until April 5th.

Why don't I stop right there. I've got a little bit to say after that trial, but why don't I stop there and let you give us some more colorful parts of this episode. (chuckles)

BATMAN: Well, it's interesting that so many people were arrested and tried and some found guilty who unquestionably didn't realize that they were trapped in this thing. One of the difficulties about relating this event is that there are some very fine people living in Terre Haute today whose fathers and grandfathers were indicted, and some of them were convicted and rightfully so because they were guilty of some of the numerous federal statutes that had been passed just in time to catch this net full of politicians.

For example, there were two or three doctors in Terre Haute who were men outstanding and very upright citizens. Lots of things that went on in their precinct . . . they were charged with certain responsibilities -- certain obligations -- and probably they violated them. Lots of people work on election boards and do things that technically are in violation of the law. They don't intend to commit a crime; they don't intend to do wrong, but in some cases they do. And in a number of these situations, that happened. And it's unfortunate because no one likes to say grandfather went to jail. Ha! But there were a lot of -- perhaps not a lot -- but there were several individuals who probably had not participated in this thing and knowingly would not have done so. But unfortunately the law covers the just and the unjust.

DR: That's an excellent point, Howard, just an excellent point. Especially back then, a lot of times people would go out to work in the polls and they would be instructed by some of the people that they depended upon. And, as you say, we know some of those federal laws were just passed . . .

BATMAN: That's right.

DR: . . . in early 1914.

BATMAN: And, of course, Donn Roberts had charge of the people who were instructing the people at the polls. If certain /events/ take place at the polls which should have been under surveillance, people /were/ instructed to stop it or should have been instructed to stop it. They didn't do so and they were more-or-less guilty by association.

DR: I know once I was talking with Governor Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia. This was four or five years back before he became governor. We were kidding him a little bit about how much money his grandfather made, which was (chuckles) apparently just an unbelievable amount. Jay chuckled and said, "Well, my granddad didn't break any laws at all. But he certainly was responsible for the writing of several."

BATMAN: (laughs heartily)

DR: Such as the cartel laws, and . . .

BATMAN: Yes. He caused the enactment of some statutes.

DR: Well, Howard, when that trial of the . . . a number of the 116 people pleaded guilty and were processed and so on. But during the same trial where Donn Roberts was convicted, there were 21 of the 116 people in that particular group that were convicted and received prison sentences. I have a record here. Mayor Roberts got the most sentences and the most fine, and the judge that you told us about fined him \$2,000 and sentenced him to six years on the first count. He was given two years on the second count, two years on the third count, five years on the fourth count, and these could all be served concurrently. So, he served a total of three and one-half years at the United States Penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas, and paid the \$2,000 fine. His sentences totaled 15 years, but since it was concurrent, he only served three and a half.

His attorney -- his defense attorney -- was A. O. Stukey (s-t-u-k-e-y), /a/ former congressman.

DR: I wondered if you had remembered much about him or . . . I mean from your reading or talking with people.

BATMAN: I don't know much about Stukey. The stories that I have been able to put together was that he /was⁷ selected not only because he was a brilliant lawyer of his time and had defended some rather sensational cases in Indiana, but he was also known to be on very friendly terms with Judge Anderson. But the Judge's record was such that friendship would not mean very much. He was a pretty hard judge, and I doubt if the employment of Mr. Stukey had very much to do with it.

DR: Um hm.

BATMAN: He probably made as good a defense as he could and that was that.

DR: Well, I know this police chief Hollar apparently had given great amounts of evidence and was excused from prosecution, but he was kind of a right-hand man to the mayor in the planting of these guns on people and this sort of thing. He escaped.

Sheriff Dennis Shea and all of his people were convicted and went off to prison.

I notice that one of the witnesses was Governor Samuel Ralston, who took the stand and testified that just a short time after the election Mayor Roberts and one or two of the people from Terre Haute had come to him and asked that he issue a certificate of election for Judge Eli Redman. Governor Ralston indicated that he was a little bit hesitant to do that. And as I understand . . . as I remember now from reading this, he didn't do it. But Redman did get certified and was seated by the 10-vote margin.

It's interesting to note that Judge Redman and his son both were convicted, and both served time in Leavenworth. These 21 persons all served something between three years right down to six months and the fines, other than that of Mayor Roberts, ranged anywhere from \$1,000 down to \$100 fine, according to the

DR: thing. And, as you said, I'm sure that a number of these people probably were rightfully convicted, but just probably had no real idea that they were doing anything all that wrong.

Well, they went out to Leavenworth. Mayor Roberts served three and a half years beginning in late April of 1915. The train came through town, and I've heard that story there were something like 15,000 people that . . . well, there were crowds waving and . . . to greet the train at Brazil and at Greencastle and when it got to Terre Haute, it stopped for a while and there were some 15,000 people there. Mayor Roberts and Judge Redman, I think, and one or two of the others stepped out for a moment on the platform. I think they had handcuffs, or shackles; they'd been playing pinochle. And then after the train got water or whatever, they proceeded then on to Kansas, to Leavenworth.

Well, he got back to Terre Haute, I believe in the middle of 1919. And he lived about 16 years beyond that time. From what reading I've been able to do and checking I've been able to do, he engaged in numerous businesses, one of which he would buy old tanks and mount them on automobile bodies and place them on the right-of-way -- the public right-of-way -- at various places around town. At one time he had as many as 16 of those. He would buy a cheap type of gasoline in Illinois, and then he would sell the gasoline. His nephew, Bill Roberts that lives in West Terre Haute, told me that he used to watch Uncle Donn do that. I understand that some of the legitimate service station operators in town just absolutely didn't care for that at all. Some of his locations were at Wabash and 25th Street and some other places.

He also operated a laundry for a while. They had a gas explosion that killed the grocer that lived next door. And he dabbled some in politics as I've heard you say. /I_7 think he even tried to run for mayor once and even tried to run for governor one time.

BATMAN: Yeah.

DR: What . . . do you want to cut in there or just . . . something along that line? I've got some notes

DR: that tell me the last days of his life. I'd like to put those on.

BATMAN: Yeah. No, I think that probably covers it. He was a reasonably successful business man. And no one ever doubted that he wasn't a smart, bright fellow. And it's too bad he fell in evil ways politically. He might have gone a long way on his own.

DR: His nephew Bill said that Uncle Donn didn't smoke, didn't drink. He liked to drive the car fast. They had a 350-acre farm at Farmersburg, and after Uncle Donn came back from the penitentiary -- the federal penitentiary -- he spent some time improving the roads and the buildings on the farm and also dabbling with his service station business, the laundry business, and oh, some other smaller business ventures.

That'll kind of bring us up now to 1936 and here is another kind of a little bit of tragedy that wound up his life. He would not pay the state excise tax on his gasoline sales. And he was indicted and tried in the local courts for that and was sentenced to the Indiana State Penitentiary at Michigan City in the summer of 1936. He had been up there about a month, as I understand it, and on July 31, 1936, he suffered a terrible heart attack. He was put in an ambulance on Saturday, August 1, and driven back to Terre Haute, /and/ taken to his home which set at 305 South 7th Street. That's where the Shell Station now is . . .

BATMAN: That's right; on the corner.

DR: On the . . . up high there. I understand that house has been moved to someplace in the south end of town, and I've done a little bit of checking /but/ I can't find it. I'm going to try to find that house so I can take a picture of it. His nephew Bill told me he was just certain it had been moved along with a couple of other houses. But we'll see if we can find it to get a picture.

And then on Sunday, August the 2nd, he died of that heart attack. He was . . . the funeral service

DR: was a private funeral service held on Tuesday, August the 4th, 1936, at the Gillis Funeral Chapel. Now that building was in the old Hulman home that no longer exists. /In 1936 the Gillis Funeral Home was located on the northwest corner of 7th and Chestnut in a building that probably had been the William P. Ijams' home and never belonged to any of the Hulmans. Later this funeral operation was moved to the northeast corner of 8th and Chestnut into a home which had been occupied by the Anton Hulmans.⁷ That was up there near the campus of the university. They didn't have any singers. It was a Protestant minister, Reverend Myron Phillips from Centenary Methodist church. Of course, he was buried over in the St. Joseph section.

Now, Donn Roberts was not a Catholic but his wife, Mary Grace, and her family were. One report I had tells me that she was reared by some nuns in a convent. I talked to some other people -- and so far I've not had a chance to verify this -- but I understand her family was very comfortable financially and was in the pork business, and that she had owned some property. She also had some money so that when times got a little thin with Donn, why she had some funds. But here again, this kind of thing I'm going to have to check out by a lot more hard work, unless you know something for sure on that, Howard. I didn't know whether you'd done much digging around on her family or not.

Anyway, his wife Mary Grace Early Roberts died in 1960. She lived to be 91 years old. And Donn Roberts was buried then on August the 4th, 1936. He was 68 years 10 months and 4 days of age, or 56 days short of his 69th birthday. He was a big man, a handsome man. His nephew Bill tells me that he loved to eat and when he was a student at Rose Poly, he would carry a whole pie for his lunch. And Bill says he remembers when they would have family picnics at Farmersburg, Uncle Donn would eat 12 roasting ears at one time. He didn't drink, didn't smoke, never was really too . . . in his little later years, he was a little paunchy but never really a fat man at all but a big fellow.

That just about exhausts my notes on Donn Roberts, Howard.

BATMAN: Well, of course, there have been few more colorful characters in Terre Haute history than Donn Roberts. There are some deputies still living in Indianapolis who were in this group that came over.

DR: Is that right?

BATMAN: Four by the last count I had, and I have arranged to talk with them because I think they can give us some real information . . .

DR: Great!

BATMAN: . . . on, you know, what happened over here at the time, their activities and so forth.

DR: I know one thing. I want to see that door you have. I want to see that door. Is it 420?

BATMAN: Four twenty.

DR: Four twenty. I knew that's the room where they operated but for a time while Donn was waiting, Marshal Storen had him sit next door in Room 421.

BATMAN: Um hmm.

DR: But the main room where they were gathering up the indictess (laughs) was Room 420.

Well, let us for the oral history project that we're doing, let me ask . . . the historians would like . . . they'd like to have you comment on some other subjects. Let me do that.

BATMAN: All right.

DR: I'd just like to say, to what do you attribute the strength of the Democratic party in Terre Haute?

BATMAN: Well, that's rather difficult to answer I think. To a number of things. Basically, the Democratic party, I think we can all agree, is the more liberal of the two great political parties. Laboring people are generally thought to be Democrats; and people engaged in business, commerce and finance,

BATMAN: are thought to be Republicans. And, of course, that isn't necessarily true. They don't fit into a type.

Terre Haute in its early days was a city that had many coal miners. We had several breweries here and several distilleries here, and I've heard the statement made that there were some 60 saloons from the Wabash River bridge to 13th Street. Certainly there were a great many of them. And I think the great preponderance of working people were Irish and German, who made up the population at that time, normally turned into the Democratic party. And I think that was probably the backbone of the Democratic strength in this community.

The wealthier class of people, particularly at that time, were generally allied with the Republican party. It was the age of the high protective tariff and the William Jennings Bryan days of the great speech of "The Cross of Gold," the great argument as to the gold standard. And I think the entire community was such that you would normally expect it to be predominantly Democratic.

DR: I know that (I think) would be true for my home state, West Virginia. I think you could make Also, my thoughts are that usually when one party or the other gets a good early start, sometimes it just has better leaders.

BATMAN: Yes, that's true.

DR: I mean Gene Debs was quite the leader I would guess, from what I've read about Gene Debs. He had the dynamic . . . and he was a Democrat, wasn't he?

BATMAN: Yes, oh, yes. Well, Socialist but his original . . . when Debs served in the General Assembly in the State of Indiana, he served as a Democrat.

DR: That's right, and he later . . .

BATMAN: He was an employee at Hulman & Company. And it's interesting that these two real strong men, regardless of what you may think of them, they were strong men. They were leaders. And they had a dynamic personality. Debs, of course, was a Socialist, but you can't help but admire the man from the standpoint of his belief in the dignity of man. I mean,

BATMAN: most of us do not have any feeling at all for his political philosophy, but he was a man who believed that the poor man was downtrodden and oppressed. I don't think Debs was by any means a Communist. I have a feeling he believed in a capitalistic system, but he felt the working man was being put upon. He was a sort of a Charles Dickens of his era.

DR: He certainly wouldn't have approved of the Communist that we know the last 20 or 30 years, who are so brutal.

BATMAN: Oh, no!

DR: He would not have . . . certainly not have approved of that.

BATMAN: No. Debs really believed in freedom for everybody, to an excess I think. He one time said that we would never . . . he would never be happy as long as there was a man in prison (chuckles). Well, that pushes us pretty far.

DR: (laughs)

Let me go on to another topic that they'd like you to comment on.

During the time of the Ku Klux Klan, during the time that it was so active in Terre Haute in 1928, why was it connected in some way with the Republican party, if it was? Now, I'm not sure who wrote these questions, Howard. And I'm just sort of reading them as they're put down here so I don't know that that was true or not. But that's the way the question is written.

BATMAN: Well, it isn't probably exactly fair to say that the Republican party was connected with the Ku Klux Klan, but D. C. Stephenson came from southern Indiana. And it's interesting that D. C. Stephenson one time ran for Congress on the Democratic ticket. But later he found . . . he learned and found out that the Ku Klux Klan was a great racket for the promotion of a dogma philosophy which is as unAmerican as anything could be. He led his people, his organization, into a belief that a 100% American

BATMAN: would be white, and he would be Protestant, and he would be born in this country. And some of those characteristics -- or some of those qualifications that he had for his membership -- flew directly against the Democratic party.

For example, in Terre Haute I think it's perfectly safe to say that at that time the greater number of Irish and German Catholics were Democrats. I think the registration lists will no doubt show that. And many of the foreigners were Democrats. The Irish and the Germans who migrated here and the Italians were seized by the Democratic party here the same way that in Chicago the organizations there grabbed the immigrants. They grabbed the

DR: There were more of them!

BATMAN: There were more of them! And they made good, stalwart members of the Democratic party. The labor unions starting at that time were largely Democratic. And it was perfectly natural that that would come about.

But when the Klan started, it was also natural that those who were native-born, white, Protestant citizens could belong. It had a Republican flavor from the start. And to look at the election returns, you will see that in the Klan days there were periods of time in which the Democratic party did not fill one single office in Vigo County.

DR: Is that right?!

BATMAN: And to be elected, you almost had to be a member of the Ku Klux Klan. And lists of members were found which bore that out.

It's also very interesting that two very stalwart citizens of this community --Vern McMillan, who was a close personal friend of mine, one of the finest men that ever lived -- was a very straight-laced and dedicated Republican. But McMillan absolutely refused to have any part of the Ku Klux Klan, and as a result his business suffered terribly. And that's one of the interesting things about it. There were business people in this community whose business was almost ruined by the fact that they would not join the Klan. And that applied to a number of Protestant people as

BATMAN: well as to a number of foreign-born people who refused to be swayed by this bigotry and insisted that they would not join the Klan and still adhered to the Republican party. Vern McMillan was a standout in that group.

DR: Um hm.

BATMAN: So, the history of the Klan in Terre Haute was one of the greatest tragedies that a community ever went through. It separated people who had been life-long friends. It destroyed business people and it was a terrible, terrible thing. Yet they masqueraded under the slogan that they were 100% American. Yet they denied the right of some people to practice their religion and to be loyal to their race whatever it may have been.

END OF TAPE

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